



**Central Washington
Home Builders Association**

October 5, 2009

Honorable Members of the Washington State Buildings Code Council;
RE: Residential Fire Sprinklers

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a few thoughts on Residential Fire Sprinklers.

First of all let's be clear; this code proposal is not about public safety. Let's not kid ourselves. The public has not declared new homes aren't safe. If this was truly about safety, the consumers (and their attorneys) from across the country would have made known their concerns. In my work, I frequently get calls from the public complaining about something related to their building project. As a custom builder for 28 years and in this position for another 7, I've not heard from a single person complaining the building code did not adequately provide for the public's basic safety needs. Quite the contrary, I've had numerous conversations with members of the public complaining about the justification for, and costs associated with, one building code requirement or another.

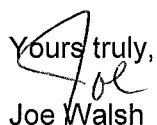
If the home buying parents of young children were unhappy with the levels of safety in their new homes, don't you think we would have heard from them? The truth is new homes are much safer than the older housing stock. The public knows this, and you know this. An unfortunate unintended consequence of adopting the residential fire sprinkler code at this time is that many of these young families will be stuck in the older housing stock for longer periods of time thus exposed to greater health risks. If this were truly about safety, the SBCC and the Governor would be looking for financial incentives for homeowners to fire sprinkle their older homes.

If this were about safety, the home building industry would have already responded to the public. You only have to look at the GREEN building movement for a recent example of the industry leading the way to meet consumer demand. That's how it works in the free marketplace. The builders and remodelers must react to the consumer-driven marketplace to be successful.

So why hasn't there been a clamoring for fire sprinklers? Consumers have always had the option for fire sprinklers any time they want them, all they have to do is ask, and pay. The market force at work here is "cost compared to benefit". To date, the costs have apparently exceeded the benefit in the view of the majority of consumers. They aren't asking for sprinklers in any great numbers (or any numbers that I'm aware of) for that simple reason. Plus the fact that they don't see the absence of fire sprinklers as a safety concern. This may explain why some fire equipment and service organizations are resorting to emotional appeals and other disquieting tactics to change that opinion.

The simple truth is that a family can greatly improve the safety of their home with working smoke detectors. Much more affordable, working smoke detectors save lives. According to the *Home Smoke Alarms*, Ahrens/NFPA 2008, the chances of surviving a reported home fire when working smoke alarms are present is 99.45%. Can we realistically reach a 100% with fire sprinklers? No, and for many reasons.

Given the state of the economy, and the fact that it was home building which lead the country out of the last 6 recessions, this is no time to put another damper on that industry. We urge you set aside this code proposal for another day. Do not mandate the residential fire sprinkler portion of the code. Allow local jurisdictions the opportunity to make that decision themselves.

Yours truly,


Joe Walsh
Government Affairs Director

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"Building and Supporting Our Communities Since 1955"

Joe Walsh

From: Steve Luten, Executive Director [exec@yakimahabitat.org]
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2009 11:06 AM
To: Joe Walsh
Subject: HFH stance on Sprinklers

Joe,
FYI: Here is our official stance on sprinklers.
Steve

HFHI Fire Sprinkler Statement

"Habitat for Humanity does not oppose fire sprinklers. We do, however, oppose a national mandate that forces installation of a fire sprinkler system into every new home.

Installation of fire sprinklers should remain a local community decision, to be made by local citizens, working with local officials.

Habitat already includes a significant amount of safety features in homes it builds — advances in fire-resistant building materials and heating and electrical systems, and requirements for hard-wired smoke alarm systems have combined to make new homes safer than ever.

A national mandate to require the installation of sprinkler systems would raise building costs and reduce the number of families we can serve at a time when more families need our help than ever before.

We encourage all homeowners to check their smoke alarms regularly and have a fire safety plan in place for their families."

Steve Luten, Executive Director
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HOMEOWNERSHIP

Its contributions to Family and Community

Habitat for Humanity International conducted a survey with the Twin Cities Affiliate in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The results of this survey support the theory that a simple, decent home has far reaching effects on other areas of concern.

- 35% of the families reported an immediate increase in the children's grades.
- 40% of the families reported an increase in long-term educational goals.
- 23% of the families reported an improvement in at least one member's health.
- 68% reported an immediate improvement in their financial condition.
- 58% of the families reported a decrease in family conflict.
- It was also found that there was a lower probability of pregnancy and criminal activity among teenagers.

A study by Habitat for Humanity of East King County in Redmond, WA. found:

- 38% of Habitat homeowners said their new home had a positive effect on the physical health of their children, including fewer trips to the doctors and hospitals.
- 67% reported less conflict in their family relationships after moving in.
- 65% reported there was a positive change in their children's grades at school.